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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

ST. FRANCIS AND ST. CLARE AS INSPIRATIONS FOR THE FAITH BASED SOCIAL WORKER

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ABSTRACT

The life mission and tradition of St. Francis and St. Clare are inspiration for the faith based social work practice. Both Saints were radical Saints of the thirteenth century who advocated for social justice and for the marginalized of their culture. Questions such as ‘Why care for the stranger?’; ‘Why strive for the common good?’; ‘Who are the deserving poor?’ can be answered for the faith based social worker in these traditions. In examining the life of St. Francis and Clare inspiration for the faith based social worker can be found in their: renunciation of wealth, conversion experience, identification with the poor, embracing the leper, advocacy for local and international peace and contemplative live style. Faith based social workers are challenged with self-reflection, passion, mission and the concepts of doing versus being.

KEY WORDS

Conversion, Common Good, Grace, Social Justice, Peace, The Rule, The Privilege of Poverty

INTRODUCTION

Story telling is an age-old practice of relaying through levels of process abstract paradoxical messages. St. Francis's followers preserved his legend in stories of miracles, humor, and humanness. There are numerous inspirational stories of St. Francis and St. Clare that speak not only to the Thirteenth Century but also to our present day political structure. The book "*The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*" retells many of these legends. The following stories are categories in three areas: stories of conversion, stories of living and stories of the rule. Each section speaks to the progression of St. Francis and St. Clare's personal conversion, how this conversion affected a commitment to a way of community life with Jesus Christ at the center and finally the rules of the community that represent the grace of working and serving. As we tell, the stories we will pose questions that challenge the faith-based social worker to reflect on prominent issues of today's world such as 'Why care for the stranger?'; 'Why strive for the common good?'; 'Who are the deserving poor?'

Before we begin these stories it is important to place St. Francis and St. Clare in the historical context. Francis and Clare were born in Assisi Italy at the end of the twelve century near the end of mediaeval society. There was a great deal of war between regions and communities of Italy as well as the fourth crusade to "liberate the Holy Land." Europe had appointed a King of Jerusalem. Currency as a means to purchase and trade was just beginning to replace the barter system. Throughout Europe there were extremes

of the very wealthy and the very poor and ill. Europeans from the Catholic Church, aristocracy and an emerging wealthy mercantile class were in constant tension for gaining influence, power, and wealth. The practice of alms was introduced to the Church as a substitute for actual acts of contrition. Leprosy was abundant and feared and those who had the disease were forced from villages to wander wearing bells to warn of their approach.

FRANCIS AND CLARE – STORIES OF INSPIRATION

STORIES OF CONVERSION

Saint Francis

Francis was born to a wealthy family and his father was involved in the trading of cloth, primarily from France. Madeleine L'Engle notes in the preface to *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi* that Francis, as a young man, was known to enjoy his wealth yet could be generous to those who were poor (Santa Marie, 1998). According to the Catholic Encyclopedia (2007) Francis went to war and was quickly captured, imprisoned, became seriously ill, and was released to recuperate after his father paid a hefty ransom. Soon after Francis' return he decided to become a Knight in the war between a local noble and the emerging power of the Emperor, Frederick the II. On his way to battle Francis again fell ill and heard a voice telling him to return to Assisi. Francis has several experiences of prayer and spiritual insight during the time that follows, seeing Christ in the eyes of a leper seeing the neglect of the physical church and

coming to an awareness of the neglect of the laity of the Church as the clergy of the time were focused on gaining wealth and influence.

Francis began to have strong disagreements with his merchant father over various acts of charity in which Francis took his father's merchandise, sold it and gave the money to the poor. After a severe disagreement Francis fled to a small church outside of Assisi. During this time Francis had another conversion experience when he heard a voice from the cross of San Damiano to rebuild the church. 'Francis, repair my church, which you see is falling into ruin.' Francis began rebuilding a church literally and then realized it was a much more global calling. In response to this calling, his wealthy father in the town square, in front of the public and the Bishop, confronted Francis. Francis stripped himself of all clothing and renounced his inheritance from his father. He declared God as his Heavenly Father. Later Francis, in emulating the lifestyle of Christ, renounced all possessions and began a life of devotion to poverty. His life of ministry began and others, to form the Order of Friars Minor (Armstrong, 1982) joined him.

Saint Clare

The story of Clare is often told as an adjunct to St. Francis. She has a beautiful, courageous, contemplative gleaming light that deserves to be recognized as separate from, yet inspired by St. Francis. Before St. Clare's birth, a mysterious voice told her mother she would bring a brilliant light into the world (Flinders, 1993). This mystical voice was prophetic of the future. Clare is called 'bright,' and 'gleaming.' Despite her enclosed life in a monastery, Clare's radiance rose up from her place of prayer to illuminate the world. She was a spiritual teacher and mystic in her own right.

Clare's family was one of the wealthiest families in Assisi. Francis lived a life of the merchant class. Clare lived a life of nobility. She lived in a grand house facing the Cathedral Piazza. Clare was well educated in Latin, history and literature. Little is known of her early childhood other than she was being prepared for a useful and well-connected marriage. Clare listened to the inspiring messages of St. Francis, as he preached in the Cathedral of San Rufino in 1210-1212. She was interested in exploring a deeper spiritual life before she heard Francis speak. Clare began going to St. Francis for spiritual instruction at the age of eighteen. A cousin accompanied her. St. Francis and his followers were controversial among the wealthy of Assisi especially in light of their proclaimed poverty, evangelical views, and radical reform efforts. Arranged marriages were the tradition and connected the royal families of Europe. Clare soon learned that she was betrothed. She sought direction from St. Francis who urged her to follow God.

Another tradition of the nobility was a coming out party for the daughter's of the town's best families on Palm Sunday. On this Palm Sunday, Clare was to go forward and receive the Bishops blessing, but at the last minute, she did not comply. The Bishop knowing her passion of Christ and her recent renunciation of many personal items walked to her with a Palm defying a social tradition that she was to rise and come to him. Flinders (1993, p. 19) states, "In all likelihood, this was the same bishop who had wrapped his own cloak around Francis a few years earlier, the day Francis stood before him in the town square and divested himself of every last thread of his paternity." Of course, deeper religious symbolism may also exist. Palm Sunday commemorates the day that Christ fulfilled a prophecy that Jerusalem's king would enter the city on a donkey. The Palm's symbolize Christ's martyrdom. On that, Palm Sunday Clare fled with the

help of the Bishop and a cousin to Saint Mary's church in Portiuncula where Francis and his followers had settled. Francis cut off Clare's long hair, shaved her head and gave her a tunic that would identify her as a follower. Clare later moved to Benedictine Church, San Paolo de Abbadesse to protect her from her family. Clare's relatives pursued her and tried to make her return home. In one of these encounters, Clare pulled off her veil and revealed her shaved head. Her beautiful hair was gone. She would no longer be attractive to the wealthy suitors. The irrevocability of her decision was clear. She was Christ's bride. She would live a life of sacrifice patterned after Christ.

Clare and her followers eventually moved to San Damiano, the little church outside of Assisi that St. Francis had restored. Her sisters Angus, and Beatrice and their mother eventually joined her. The convent represented genuine freedom for women who were constrained by the time and culture.

Within three years, Clare would direct the women who came to San Damiano as followers. She relied on God's infinite grace to fulfill her role as Mother and nourish the sister's bodies and spirits. Clare became a living conduit for divine grace. Within a few years, there were fifty sisters at San Damiano. Clare had great courage and leadership. To protect the sisters during time of war Clare stood at the main entrance and held high the monstrance containing the consecrated bread. The Arab Mercenaries left without harming the sisters.

Conversion and the Social Work Process

The stories of conversion for these two Saints speak directly to the Social Work process of today. Francis's process of conversion included a process of jarring experiences of war, imprisonment, illness. These experiences led to withdrawal, greater

prayer and reflection, solitude, travel to Rome and the experience of the San Damiano Cross that turned his prior materialist and power-driven world upside down. As he gradually reinvested in the world as a new person, a person born in the Word he began his ministry that entailed a lifetime conversion. Clare's conversion took place six years after Francis'. Her conversion can be attributed to multiple awareness of the cultural times and the situation of medieval women regarding social obligations, arranged marriages determined along political class and economic lines. However, more importantly there was a calling, a sense of Grace, an inner voice that represented the Franciscan charism that would unfold. Clare was open and responded to this divine light within.

In today's world the process of change for an individual or family often includes a jarring experience, a time of withdrawal and reflection, and a reengagement in life with a new world view. This process may include veterans returning from war, abortion, death of a loved one, loss of a relationship, parent-child conflict, loss of a job, illness, midlife crises, coming to terms with one's limits. A time of reflection may include a leave from work, withdrawal from social activities, retreat, pilgrimage, and volunteering, and psychological withdrawal. A reengagement in life with a new worldview can take months or year. The work of social workers facilitates this process and an environment in which one can work toward the goals of reinvestment in life with a new purpose. Social Workers must also be aware of that change that occurred in their own life to draw him or her to the service of others. The struggles and insights give personal accounts of the change process relating compassion for the self and extended compassion for others. The

jarring experience, the self-reflection and the new birth emerge with a mission and purpose driven life similar yet different from that of St. Francis and St. Clare.

STORIES OF LIVING

Francis Sees Christ in and Advocates for the Marginalized

Saint Francis met a person with leprosy on the road while in his travels. He recognized Christ in the eyes of this person. It is a powerful story of deeper conversion, compassion, advocacy for social justice and service to the poor and marginalized.

Catholic Encyclopedia (2007) states:

One day, while crossing the Umbrian plain on horseback, Francis unexpectedly drew near a poor leper. The sudden appearance of this repulsive object filled him with disgust and he instinctively retreated, but presently controlling his natural aversion he dismounted, embraced the unfortunate man, and gave him all the money he had.

The National Shrine of Saint Francis (2007) expands on this encounter:

In a decisive moment of illumination, Francis suddenly perceived in this leper the embodiment of God's beauty, a human being to be loved and cared for tenderly. By embracing the leper, the Saint learned to embrace all people just as Jesus did. As a community, the friars nursed and bathed the lepers, beginning the Franciscan tradition of special attention to the poor and outcast.

Francis built his theology that all creation is a manifestation of God and that Christ dwells in each person. He embraced the leper, ministered to the marginalized and saw Christ in all people. As Social Workers we can be inspired by Francis in our responsibility to see Christ in the sick and marginalized. We can be compelled, like Francis, to our collective responsibility to social justice and advocacy. Francis while writing his "Testament" at the end of his life stated (Armstrong, 1982):

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy on them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world.

Saint Francis adopted a vivid strengths perspective. He moves from seeing lepers as vile to being changed by them. Francis allowed himself to see the sweetness of God in those suffering and in seeing Christ in others he was transformed. In writing his “Early Rule” Francis instructs the Order: “And they must rejoice when they live among the people [who are considered to be] of little worth and are looked down upon, among the poor and powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside”(Armstrong & Brady, 1982, p.117). Social Workers can be inspired by Saint Francis’ experience and transformed by their identification with him; resulting in an opportunity to advocate for and see the strengths of the marginalized of today’s society. This is a strong Judeo Christian value and a value to many religious traditions. Saint Francis challenges our profession, especially the faith based social worker, to further reflect on caring for the stranger, striving for the common good and advocating for social justice.

Francis begins a change in social values that recognizes the poor and marginalized are to be ministered to and respected. They are the face of Christ. This was the beginning of what we would today call Francis’ macro practice. This alignment with the marginalized was a radical identification with the revelation of Francis of the “poor and suffering Christ.” Christ was poor and suffered. Francis felt compelled to lead the same life and to see the “Suffering and Poor Christ” in those marginalized. Francis promises us that if we adopt this position it leads to a deeper awareness of and relationship with the Divine. Our current context of social work focuses on empowerment. What could be

more empowering than the Devine? This was a radical position Francis was taking in his cultural context that despised and alienated those who were disenfranchised. In parallel process; the faith based social worker takes a radical position in our society advocating for social justice issues.

Francis asked his followers to also adopt this radical way of living and believing. Francis challenged his society and culture to adjust and change the dominant view of the marginalized. Later using alms for charity, Francis demonstrated that we collectively are responsible for the marginalized. Rather than using alms collected by the Order Minor to build monasteries he broke with the culture of his time and started early hospitals. Keep in mind that Francis was not a fund raiser or administrator, but was most content with the hands on caring of the ill and with challenging the norms of his current faith culture. With these new hospitals he was breaking with the traditional societal response to these persons of need. He challenged the popular metaphors that led to societal rejection of the outcast to one of compassion and desire to care for the marginalized in their own communities.

One could consider our health care crisis. We have marginalized the sick and poor in our culture. Franciscan values would challenge society that it is our obligation to assist those in need and reform policy rather than preserving a status quo approach to health care delivery. How can we develop a health care system that provides for the neediest in our society? We are challenged by Francis to see Christ in others and advocate for their need. When reaching out to those with leprosy Francis was met with some disapproval as these individuals were to be left to wander without food, clothing, shelter and physical assistance. This is parallel to the homeless, unemployed, families without medical

insurance and families living in poverty today in the United States. The National Association Social Work (N.A.S.W.) code of ethics (1998) challenges social workers to advocate for social justice and serve the marginalized. The code identifies social justice as a core value for the social work profession and states in its preamble:

Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. "Clients" is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice.

St. Francis began his mission after kneeling in prayer before the San Damiano Cross and hearing the words of Jesus speaking directly to him "Francis, go repair my house, which, as you see, is falling into ruin." Francis initially took this literally and built three churches. After embracing the leper, he realized that Jesus meant that Francis should rebuild the gospel church. The two divergent ideals of doing (building the church) vs. being (being the church) are parallel struggles that a social worker must also mature into. Social Worker's are challenged to discern: when is it appropriate to do for a client getting food, clothing, shelter, resources and when is it appropriate to be present allowing the process of change to unfold in the context of the relationship.

Francis and the Christmas Crib

Our society and culture is aware of the nativity scenes in churches and homes at Christmas. This practice comes to us from Francis. In a little town on the river called, Greccio, Francis celebrated Christmas with his followers and the town's people. The clergy of the time gave intellectual reflections on the meaning of Christmas. Common working class and the poor did not always resonate with intellectual dogma. Francis

believed: “Out of the reverence for the Son of God ... all men ought to give a good meal to our brothers the Oxen and Asses on Christmas Eve. Similarly, on Christmas day the poor ought to be handsomely fed by the rich” (Davis; McMonigle; Muir; 2003). In Greccio, the whole valley gathered for a Mass celebrated literally in a stable with an Ox, Ass, Sheep and hay. Francis preached about each animal present as well as about the Christ Child, Mary and the Joy of the celebration. Francis desired to give the people a personal experience of change, similar to the joy experienced in Bethlehem on the first Christmas at the birth of Christ. This personal experience of change was in contrast to an intellectual reflection on the meaning of Christmas that many did not resonate. Francis inspires and affirms the social work process of giving others a new experience in the context of the social work relationship. He also inspires the values of service, humility and gratitude.

Francis and the Importance of Peace and Reconciliation

Later in his ministry Francis enunciates his concern for peace and reconciliation. Like many in Europe, Francis, before his conversion, saw fighting war and the crusades of the Middle East as an opportunity for the spoils of war, obtaining positions of societal respect, and opportunity for positions of power. However, in his ministry he becomes keenly aware of the power of peace and this becomes central to his advocating for change in a larger society. Two life stories involve Francis negotiating peace between a village and a wolf and Francis casting out demons.

One telling of the story of St. Francis and the Wolf is related by the National Shrine of St. Francis (2007):

On one such occasion, the people of the small town of Gubbio alerted Francis to the presence of a ferocious wolf in their countryside. All efforts

to trap the wolf or drive him away had failed, so they called upon the Saint to intervene. He went out with only the message of the Gospel: no weapon, no sanctions, and no threatening bravado. Francis met the wolf and called him to repentance for the chaos and harm that he had caused. The wolf and the townspeople agreed to live in peace; the wolf would refrain from attacks and the townspeople would feed the wolf for the rest of his life.

According to Boff (1984), these stories are of course not literal but likely are stories about Francis negotiating peace between the many warring factions of towns in Italy. The wolf is sometimes thought to be an outlaw. Francis convinced the outlaw to change his life. Francis preached reconciliation with the village. An agreement was made to live in mutual aid without further conflict. The way of Francis was an alternative way that earned respect with the ordinary people and with those in power.

The casting out of demons was also thought to be a metaphor for Francis' ability to advocate for peace and reconciliation. In 13th century Italy numerous skirmishes between areas of the country would break out. Towns would pillage other communities and there often would be infighting over power within a village resulting in distress for its citizens. Violence was met with violence and it seemed to be constant. Francis decided to confront these cultural norms of violence and revenge. He became a negotiator of peace building on the commonalities of faith and building on the concepts of the need for reconciliation rather than revenge. Francis rejected violence as a norm and preached forgiveness and negotiated peace (Boff, 1984).

Eventually Francis decided he must be active and not passive about the war and the Crusades in the Middle East. He and his followers encouraged young men to join religious orders to avoid any conscription into the military. He encouraged them to live a life of service and peace. Francis sought out dialogue with Moslem leaders to inform

them of a Gospel of peace as the true value of the West. He left the protection and comfort zone of Italy, risked martyrdom and spoke out to Crusaders and Muslims in Egypt to stop the war and pillaging in the Middle East. Francis and one other brother walked through the battle lines and sought out a meeting with the sultan. His intention was to convert the sultan. The biography of the National Shrine of St. Francis (7007) states:

In the midst of the Fifth Crusade of 1219, Francis dramatically crossed the battle lines at Damietta in order to speak with Malik al-Kamil, the Ayubid Sultan of Egypt. Intrigued by the courage and simplicity of this bold but unassuming man, the Sultan recognized in Francis a Christian unlike any other. In their meeting, did they exchange their respective visions of the world and God's role in it? Historians report that Malik al-Kamil was moved by his words and listened to Francis very willingly. With admiration for his visitor, the Sultan spared Francis and sent him back to Italy.

Francis' message was clear. Based on his faith he was willing to even sacrifice his own life to address a war and attempt to promote mutual understanding as opposed to violence. Against the norms of both cultures he preached and lived a life that promoted understanding and reconciliation as opposed to violence. The experience of Francis has the potential to speak to the violence and war in today's conflicts in the Middle East. The instability of our current international situation engenders fear and violence. Francis' literal living out of the gospel imperatives of peace and compassion has the potential to challenge the leaders of the world to relate in a courageous embrace of the other.

Stories of Clare – Francis and Clare Eat a Meal Together

When St. Francis was staying in Assisi, he often visited St. Clare and provided spiritual direction. She desired to eat a meal together, but St. Francis always refused this request. The friars persuaded Francis to eat a meal with Clare and to honor

her request. Francis, wanting to make the occasion special, chose St. Mary of the Angels for the meal. Clare was cloistered at San Damiano. She would enjoy visiting the place where she became a spouse of the Lord Jesus. Clare came to St. Mary of the Angels accompanied by one sister companion. The meal was simple, served on the ground in picnic form. As the party sat down to a humble meal, they entered an exalted state while speaking about God. For many miles around people observed a bright, fiery glow. The men of Assisi believed the entire district that the church of St. Mary of the Angels and the whole Palace was aflame. The men of Assisi ran in great haste to save the Palace and put out the fire. When they reached the Place, they saw that nothing was on fire. They found St. Francis with St. Clare and all the companions sitting around that humble table, rapt in God by contemplation. It was a heavenly not a material fire that God had shown them to symbolize the fire of divine love; love that was burning in the souls of the holy friars and nuns. St. Francis and St. Clare and their companions felt so refreshed by spiritual food that they paid little attention to the prepared meal. St. Francis and St. Clare's friendship has a subplot of a courtly love story. There is a deeper truth. The fiery glow was transformed into a boundless love for everyone around them. Their relationship demonstrated the presence of Christ as Grace (Flinders, 1993).

STORIES OF THE RULE

Francis and his Brothers

As the followers of Francis grew he appealed to Pope Innocent III to allow for his followers to form an official Order of Religious. This was granted with the support of his Bishop. In an effort to control for schisms the Papal office supported the notion that newly forming orders should select previously adopted and written rules of an existing

order. However, how does one adopt a rule for the radical Franciscans when the existing rules are based on monastic lifestyles? These early Franciscans had no home, no possessions, were in the communities doing good deeds and were largely lay persons. Francis was pressed to write a rule for this order.

These writings of St. Francis can also be motivating for faith based social workers. One example is the position Francis takes regarding the grace and service in work. Among many lessons we are reminded by Francis of three major positions for social workers when engaging in practice at all levels.

First Francis wrote in his 5th chapter of the rule: “But they should not be so busy that the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, which all earthly goods should foster, is extinguished” (Third Order Rule V.18). In our busy practices, we often can become very unbalanced and our priorities confusing. We can begin to neglect ourselves and those who love us. The number of studies on burnout is commonly known. Our social work practices are important but not effective if we lose our spiritual source. Francis reminds us to remain connected to the source that brings life and empowers our work. Francis writings reinforce that to be effective we need to be rooted in and seeking our spiritual relationship with Christ. As important as our work is we need to keep ourselves spiritually fed.

Secondly in the 5th chapter of the rule Francis writes "The friars to whom God has given the grace of working should work in a spirit of faith and devotion..." (Armstrong, 1982). Francis legitimizes and reminds us that for social workers of faith we are called to be social workers and as such, we approach our practice with a faith that God has brought us to the client and that we are to see our work as a direct expression of our faith. As the

client comes to us, the client teaches us. We listen and learn with humility. This is a mutual process. We, to, are brought to the client; and the client is affected by our mutual relationship.

Finally, in this 5th chapter of the rule Francis exhorts, “None of the brothers may be treasurers or overseers in any of those places where they are staying to serve or work among others...Let them instead, be the lesser ones and be subject to all in the same house” (Armstrong, 1982). Francis reminds us that we are to serve our clients on multiple levels as Christ in the Leper. We are to approach our practice with humility, not seeking our own desires for power or influence. In fact, Francis would challenge that as social workers of faith we not seek positions of influence or power but make our selves the servant of all others. Sometimes in our attempts to foster empowerment for those marginalized we are ask to engage in attempts to actually gain power and influence for our own aggrandizement. We can remind ourselves, as we examine the life and teachings of Francis, to approach our practice with an attitude of spiritually nurturing ourselves and others. Our practice is a calling and expression to others of our faith. We practice from attitudes of humility and service.

The Poor Clare’s

Francis was called “The Little Poor Man” and professed he had married Lady Poverty. Clare lived out St. Francis teaching radically, proclaiming poverty to be a privilege. She took an uncompromising stance related to poverty. During this era, the convents possessed no land or material possession. Large landholdings that were set aside for feeding the hungry and caring for the sick supported the convents. The Poor Clare’s lived on the alms brought to the convent. They could not go out to beg for alms. They

trusted divine providence and the generosity of lay people. The church hierarchy was uncomfortable with this holy poverty. They felt responsible and wanted to give the poor Clare's an endowment to fall back on. Clare refused. She believed the church hierarchy was not responsible for the poor Clare's. God was and God would provide. The Poor Clare's had an on going relationship with the Friars whom would obtain alms for the sisters and give them spiritual instruction. After Francis's death, some of the friars wanted to be released of this obligation. Pope Gregory IV tried to end this tie requiring the friars to stop their spiritual instruction. Clare responded with a hunger strike. She declared that if the Sisters would not receive spiritual sustenance, they would not accept bread. Gregory backed down. Clare rebelled against church authority and insisted on the privilege of poverty (Flinders, 1993; Mueller, 2006).

Cardinal Hugolino gave the poor Clare's a Rule based on Saint Benedict. This rule omitted Clare's two deepest concerns: absolute poverty and a link to the friars that Francis had promised. Pope Innocent IV overturned this command and offered the poor Clare's an opportunity to compose their own rule. Clare wrote her rule three years before her death. She was the first women to write a rule for monasteries. Innocent IV confirmed the *Rule of Clare* just two days before her death in 1253.

In writing the Rule, she broke her silence. She found her public voice. Feminists would be proud. The tone of her rule is joyous and resembles a vision of community that reflects Carol Gilligan and the Stone Centers work on women's development in relationship. Clare maintained her Privilege of Poverty stating "no one can compel you to receive possessions" (Carney, 1993, p. 69). In the rule, Clare states the Lord frequently reveals what is best to the least among us through Divine Inspiration. This led to a spirit

of community in which the Abbess would bring the sisters together to consult. She recognized that the Holy Spirit that brought them together would work in and through them. The community would also utilize a process of discernment in which the abbess position would be less powerful. Her rule reflects good sense, feminine confidence that “We can work it out as we go along.” Poor Clare’s, while cloistered can go out “for a useful, reasonable, evident and approved purpose” (Carney, 1993). The sisters were instructed to wear cheap garments out of love for the Christ Child Who was wrapped in swaddling clothes. Clare’s rule radiates joy and gratitude for their vocation. Clare’s rule describes voluntary poverty that places total trust in God and accepts what ever comes in as enough.

Carney (1993, p. 110) states: “After Clare’s rejection of social affluence, she encountered yet another form of contention. After abandoning the world of social privilege to live within the sphere of poverty, she faced the ironic necessity of struggling against ecclesiastical power that sought to guarantee the economic security and privileges of medieval monasteries.” The Poor Clare’s wanted only to serve and work in the Spirit of holy prayer. This feminist struggle against the culture, society of the times and the church dogma is parallel to today’s faith based feminist struggles.

CONSLUSIONS ON THE GRACE OF WORKING AND SERVING

**Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!
Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!
Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance!
And transform your entire being into the image
Of the Godhead Itself through contemplation
(Early Documents) (Flinders, 1993, p. 23)**

Clare had asked the question “How can a soul filled with Christ be poor?” Others described Clare as filled with joy, never upset, never disturbed, always rejoicing in the

Lord (Flinders 1993). Her Charism comes from within and is a reflection of an already-present Spirit. Charism is an inward capacity freely given by the Spirit for the growth of Christ's body. "To each person the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good" (1Cor12:7). For Clare her "holy poverty was an expression of her union with God, not just a means for reaching it. If your mind is truly fixed on God you won't need a warm cloak, because God's love will surround and embrace you" (Flinders, 1993, p. 24). Clare believed trust in the goodness of God is rewarded by providential wonders.

Francis and Clare both believed that to be poor is necessary to read and be in tune with the reality of those who experience powerlessness. They believe to return to simplicity reveals what is hidden in plain sight. To be wealthy and have all ones needs and wants met keeps one from realizing God's Grace and keeps one from needing God. It is in our need and our powerlessness that Gods Grace and God's power can be experienced. As we are present to our clients in their need we see the poverty of Christ and the Grace of Christ.

In today's busy world, it seems that we cannot place our minds, our souls on Christ if we are absorbed in worldly events and material things. On the other hand, can we – If, as 1 Cor 12:7 states that we have received the manifestation of the Spirit? - Charism? How does Charism manifest itself in concrete human action and enable others to experience being led by the Spirit? What do we, as social workers, need to do to cooperate with the Spirit within so that our clients may in turn experience the Spirit within?

To live and practice as a social worker of faith is a Grace filled calling. This paper examines the lives of Saint Francis and Saint Clare of the 13th century and how they can

inspire, guide, and instruct a parallel process for the faith based social worker. Saint Francis's followers preserved his legend in stories of miracles, humor, and humanness. These inspirational stories of St. Francis and St. Clare speak not only to the Thirteenth Century but also to our present day. The progression of St. Francis and St. Clare's personal conversion, how this conversion affected a commitment to a way of community life with Jesus Christ at the center and finally the rules of the community that represent the grace of working and serving are a model for the faith based social worker.

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